

Government-to-Government Consultation on Violence Against Women Act

Anii. My name is Stella Kay. I am the Vice Chair for the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians and I am honored to participate in the 12th Annual Government-to-Government Violence Against Women Tribal Consultation. I want to thank the Department of Justice, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of the Interior for inviting me here. LTBB greatly appreciates you honoring your trust responsibility to the Tribe by holding this consultation. I am grateful for the opportunity to testify before you today about the Violence Against Women Act. I also wish to thank the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation for hosting this event.

Since the passage of VAWA LTBB has made great strides and changes in the way we respond to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. But, there is still work to do if we are to reach our goal of breaking the cycle of violence that afflicts Native families in my community. To that end, LTBB has the following recommendations related to VAWA:

1. Too many Native teens and youth experience violence and sexual assault.

One in three adolescents in the U.S. is a victim of physical, sexual, emotional or verbal abuse from a dating partner. For Native American teens, the rate is even higher. Studies suggest that American Indians are 2.5 times more likely to experience sexual assault crimes compared to all other races, and one in three Indian women reports having been raped during her lifetime. Native teens in my community also struggle with trauma related to violence and sexual assault. LTBB has looked at several funding sources to address the problem. LTBB has used the DOJ Coordinated Tribal Assistance Solicitation grant to create a remarkable program geared towards helping my tribal youth heal from physical and sexual trauma and address related drug and alcohol issues. The LTBB CTAS Youth Program gives our Native teens culturally appropriate tools to cope with trauma. The need in our community is great but the DOJ/VAWA funding is temporary. If we are going to break the cycle of domestic violence, sexual assault and drug abuse, LTBB youth needs long-term funding to deal with the effects of exposure to violence and sexual assault. We ask the DOJ make more funds available to tribes to assist in providing services to children, teens and young adults who have experienced violence in their lives, and educate young people about domestic violence and sexual assault.

2. Broaden VAWA to include Elder's abuse cases.

30% of our population is 55 or older and considered a revered elder in our community. Many of them live with non-Indian partners and children. With the exception of children, they are the most vulnerable and preyed upon population within the community. The Tribe needs VAWA broadened to allow the Tribe to hold accountable non-Indians who harm and take advantage of our elders.

LTBB would like funding for the following initiatives that we believe would help us to keep our elders safer.

- a. 24-hour phone helpline for elder victims and non-abusing family and friends to call for information, reporting and support.

- b. Affordable long-term housing for elders, so that they may have a safe place of their own,
- c. Funding assistance for elders with legal needs that would help them leave an abusive relationship such as separation or divorce, changing a Power of Attorney or ending a guardianship.
- d. Financial assistance for housing, transportation and substance abuse treatment when leaving a harmful relationship.

3. Bridge the funding gap.

My Tribe has adopted VAWA, however we are experience extreme challenges with the associated costs. We need funding for defense counsel, detention, increased security related to DV cases, and increased court costs.

4. Provide victims of domestic violence a broad range of necessary services.

Victims of domestic violence need more than just their day in court. They need transitional housing, affordable permanent housing, substance abuse treatment, child care, life skills training, job training, transportation assistance and more. If we truly want to end the cycle of domestic violence it is not enough to address just the crime before the court. We have to help the victim reestablish themselves as a self-sufficient and capable individual. Tribes need additional funding for resources to address all these critical needs.

6. Request for quicker response from DOJ grant administrators.

Sometimes it takes months to get a budget and budget modifications approved from DOJ. That drastically delays the Tribe's ability to use the funds for the benefit of our citizens. For example, LTBB recently had a budget modification that took a year to approve. Survivor Outreach Services has had an important impact on our community through support, advocacy, community outreach and awareness. While our community is grateful for the grant, it would be more helpful if budgets and budget modifications could be approved in a timelier manner.

7. Lastly, I would like to address a comment made by Ms. Thomas. Ms. Thomas stated that the Trump Administration is committed to Tribal Native Nations. The actions of the past year by this administration suggest otherwise. The 2018 Budget Blueprint called for cuts to the BIA, IHS, EPA, VAWA, DOJ/COPS grants. The money that this administration wants to cut, provides needed programs to support our fight against violence against women. I ask you, Ms. Thomas, to go back to Washington with a statement from me... "Prove It". Prove that you care about Indian country and stop cutting the programs that we need to protect our people.

Again, I want to thank the Department of Justice and Department of Health and Human Services for inviting me here for the opportunity to testify before you today about the Violence Against Women Act. We know that domestic violence and sexual assault in Native communities won't end overnight. But by working together we are making the lives of Native women and children better.